

Questions and Answers

Topic: Guideline application

Will the BAM be turned off for rebuilding efforts in fire-affected communities?

This Guideline applies to new proposals required to apply the BAM and to assessments that were partially completed before the site was severely burnt. The Department is also looking at other strategies related to the application of the biodiversity offsets scheme (BOS) to support bushfire affected communities in re-building. We would be very interested to hear from anyone conducting assessments related to the rebuilding of homes lost in the 2019-2020 bushfires – please contact us through [BAM Support](#).

I am completing a BDAR on a site that was subject to intense (or ‘severe’) wildfire approximately 18 months ago, in which approximately 60% of the subject land was burnt. Could the same processes (in the guideline) be applied to this site? (i.e. it wasn’t burnt in the 2019-2020 bushfires, but nonetheless has been subject to similar impacts).

The guideline was developed with the most recent impacts in mind – the scope was limited to support its quick release. We will consider whether the scope can be expanded when the guideline is reviewed. Using the guideline, specifically the guidance around determining whether the vegetation on the subject land has regenerated or still represents ‘severely burnt’, would be relevant. We recommend that you discuss this particular project with your consent authority. Further advice, based on the specifics of the site can be sought via the [BAM Support](#).

What justification can an accredited assessor provide to support their justification that the native vegetation on a subject land has sufficiently recovered from the 2019-2020 bushfires, and the guidelines no longer apply?

It is expected the assessor will provide a description (at the scale of the vegetation formation) of the native vegetation observed on the subject land, with reference to the features outlined in Table 1 of the guideline. This should be supported with photographs (dated, with GPS coordinates and bearings). Where the assessor determines the native vegetation is not severely burnt, they should explain, in detail, how the combination of features observed (with reference to Table 1) constitutes sufficient recovery of the vegetation to represent the biodiversity values that existed on the site prior to the bushfire, if assessed under the BAM without the guideline. One of the primary recommendations in the guideline is to seek early agreement from the consent authority as to assessment approach at a site impacted by the 2019-2020 bushfires.

Are any of the assessment requirements in the guideline also relevant to drought-affected sites?

We are currently investigating the implications of the BAM on sites severely affected by drought. This includes a project to determine benchmarks for severe drought and a practice note for when those benchmarks would be applicable. These benchmarks will likely be our first option for supporting assessments on drought-affected sites, but it is possible that some of the same principles would apply – we will consider your suggestion.

Topic: PCT identification

How do you delay determining a PCT if you need to submit the BDAR?

The purpose of the guideline was to avoid delays with submitting the BDAR, as we understand there are timeframes that need to be met. To address this, the guideline provides a range of criteria that may be used to determine the PCT and continue with the assessment. If a PCT cannot be identified with reasonable certainty or accuracy, then we recommend you seek specific guidance from [BAM Support](#).

Topic: Vegetation integrity (VI) assessments using the guideline

What if you can do representative plots in in the vegetation zone outside the burnt portion – do you use the standard BAM?

Where any severely burnt native vegetation (determined with the use of Table 1 in the guideline) is present in a vegetation zone, that vegetation zone – it entirety – is considered 'severely burnt' and should be assessed using the guideline. Specifically, using the options outlined in Table 2, section 5.3 (Vegetation Integrity). In this case, Option 1 (using an unburnt section(s) of the vegetation zone and replicate plot data in the BAM-C) may be appropriate for assessing the vegetation integrity of that vegetation zone.

How is the importance of unburnt sites adjacent to burnt sites, or within the same site, considered?

Unburnt areas within the subject land or adjacent to the subject land are of value in the vegetation integrity assessment when applying the BAM with the guidelines. Specifically, option 1 recommends using unburnt sections of a vegetation zone to locate plots that may represent the VI of the entire vegetation zone. Option 2 recommends the selection of a surrogate site that reasonably represents the severely burnt vegetation zone prior to the recent bushfire (as detailed in Box 1 of the guideline) within 10km of the subject land. The general principle is to select a surrogate site as close as possible to the subject land.

Could you collate the VI data for PCTs from all the BDARs submitted to date, and average the VI scores to develop broad condition classes that would assist with applying option 4 in the guideline? For example, you might have a list of PCTs with low, moderate and good condition classes and associated VI scores.

The coming three months are anticipated to be a trial of this guideline and we are considering different scenarios that emerge with a view to improving it. We are interested in feedback from anyone applying option 4, specifically the outcomes you are coming up with and whether the adoption of broad condition states would provide a better alternative.

Topic: Threatened species assessments

How are threatened flora, which are assessed by count, determined and assessed using the guideline?

There is potential for flora (assessed by count) to still be counted if they can be identified. This will depend on a range of factors specific to that species in response to the bushfire, including the fire intensity and species sensitivity to fire. These factors should be considered by the expert when forming their opinion. The guideline also allows for the survey of threatened plant species

(assessed by count) that are fire responders where they meet the criteria outlined in Table 2, Section 6.4 (Threatened species survey). We acknowledge the challenge arising from individuals assessed by count being defined as a single mature organism in the BAM, and that many species will take time to mature – this time period will vary between species.

What process should an assessor follow in the case of a severely burnt site, when there is no registered expert for the species?

Where there is no expert available for the species of interest, you may locate your own expert and if they are interested in becoming a registered expert, we can provide further assistance. Further information on experts, including how to become an expert is available on the [BOS website](#). Please contact Bam_experts@environment.nsw.gov.au.

Will there be a review of ecosystem species post-fire?

At this stage we are not doing any reviews of a threatened species profile post-fire. We are however, very interested in understanding the impacts of the fires on particular species. This understanding would add context to the principles of why we have assigned a species or part of a species' habitat to that ecosystem credit site. If any changes occur to species listing status or there is quantified evidence that the fires have severely affected species populations or critical parts of their habitat, then it is likely we would make changes based on this.

Topic: Guidance for burnt biodiversity stewardship sites

Will there be guidance released on the application of the BAM Stage 3 to severely burnt sites?

Yes, we will be working with the BCT to develop guidance for assessing biodiversity stewardship sites. This will likely be a longer process, as the assessment of gain on a stewardship site will involve more risk and complexity. For example, in plant communities that would not typically burn, the principle used in the guidance for BDARs and BCARs of estimating the biodiversity values that existed prior to fire will become more complex, as we are potentially creating credits for something that may not return.

What monitoring requirements are there for biodiversity stewardship sites following a catastrophic bushfire? If there currently is none, is this something that DPIE/BCT will want done in future?

The BSA should have a range of monitoring requirements included in the agreement. The management plan is based on an adaptive management approach will allows for updating the management plan in response to disturbance such as bushfire. Furthermore, the BCT is currently developing detailed guidance on monitoring biodiversity outcomes on biodiversity stewardship sites, including post-fire monitoring. This should be available in June 2020.